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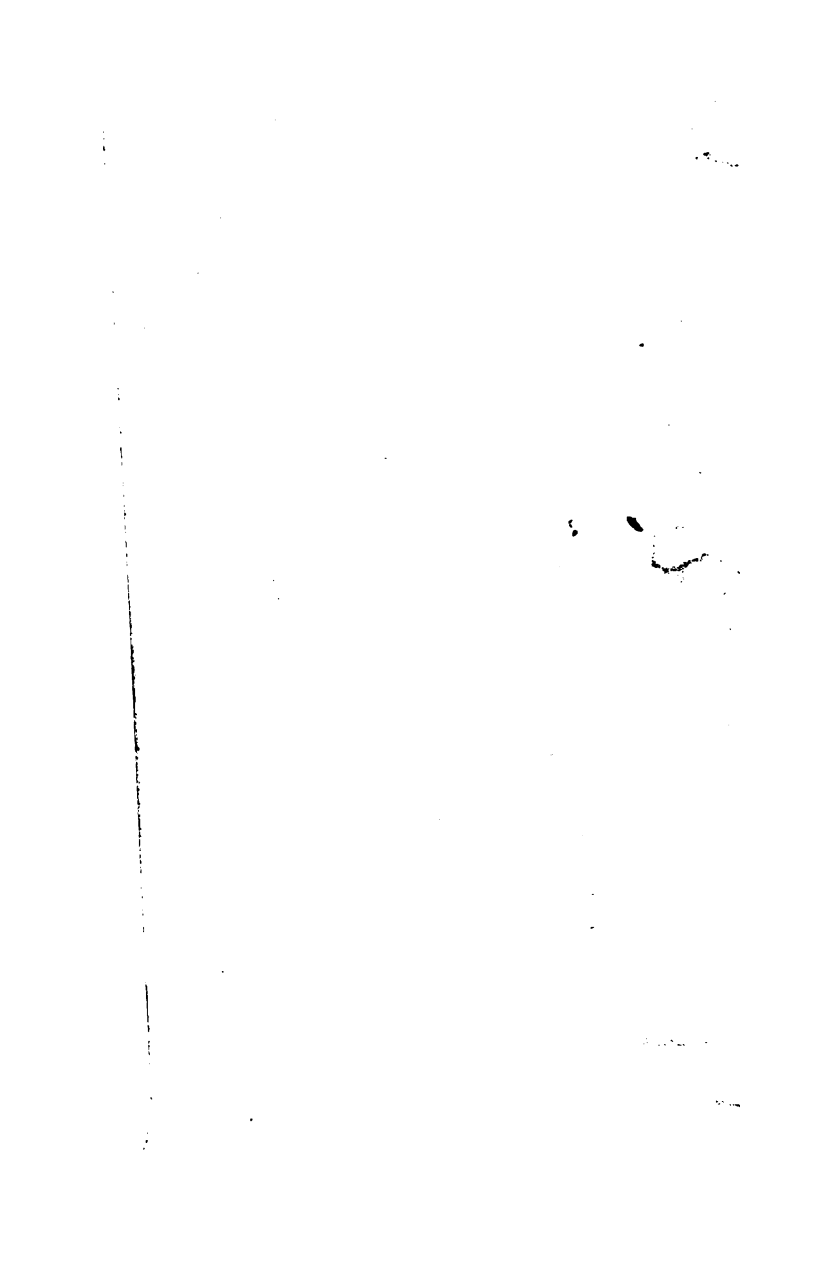


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ESTHER:

A SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE.

BY A LADY.

TOGETHER WITH

AN ORIGINAL POEM,

BY

MISS H. F. GOULD.

NEW YORK:

D. APPLETON & CO., 200 BROADWAY.

1835.

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P R E F A C E .

It is a happy feature of the present age, that public attention is extensively called to the moral training of the young. The fact of such attention is strikingly evinced in the establishment of so many Infant and Sunday Schools, and in the rapid production of serious juvenile publications. But these schools must still be increased, both in magnitude and number ; and, as they increase, an adequate quantity of wholesome mental aliment must be

provided. Every little work which can stimulate to industry, economy, and sobriety, to the discharge of filial and fraternal duties, and to the cultivation of benevolent action, should be hailed as a harbinger of good. Those works which are calculated to attract the opening mind to the study of the sacred Scriptures, are, it is believed, peculiarly important at the present time. There is a growing sentiment, and one of an auspicious character, in almost every Protestant community, that questions of doctrine and principles of action are to be brought to the pages of the Bible for adjustment. "What hath the Lord

taught," is becoming a more common as well as more rational inquiry, than what is to be gathered from the whispers of tradition, from the jarring suggestions of early uninspired history, or from the arid fields of metaphysical speculation. Let this resort to the umpirage of the Bible be encouraged, let the young, especially, be taught to repair to this sacred record for wisdom, let the study of it be rendered as attractive as possible by the help of maps, charts, and brief expositions, and we cannot but anticipate a great increase of early conversions, and a growing harmony of views among the chosen of the Lord.

To the hope of adding some small stimulus to the early reading of the Scriptures, this little book owes its existence. The volume is humble, making no pretensions to deep research or to eloquence of diction. It is the simple story of that lovely pious queen whose name it bears. From its brevity, its modern dress, and school-book form, it was thought that it might awaken in some youthful readers a desire to search and ponder the *inspired* narrative of this same illustrious personage, and subsequently to peruse other biographies with which the Old Testament abounds. The idea of preparing the work was suggested by a

friend, who, as well as the author, in a course of Bible-class instruction, had occasion to study the book of Esther. Should this little volume prove acceptable to youthful readers, possibly others, drawn from the Old Testament, and of the same historical character, may, ere long, succeed.

For the short poem, "Esther, the Jewess," appended to this work, the author is much indebted, and would here express her gratitude, to her kind friend, Miss H. F. Gould, whose sprightly and benevolent muse is both known and appreciated by the American public.

ESTHER.

ESTHER was a Jewess, and the book called by her name is a wonderful history of a scattered remnant of that people to which she belonged. The nation, after a long captivity, had been restored according to the promise of God, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, the ways of Zion no longer mourned because none came to her solemn feasts; "for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the wives also and the children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

But there was still a remnant scattered among the heathen. They too served the God of their fathers, and refused to bow down to the idols of the nations. But forgetting that God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, they were content to serve him afar off. Enjoying in common with the heathen their cultivated fields and vineyards, they had probably ceased to sigh over the desolation of Jerusalem, or to count the number of the years of their captivity, and were perhaps saying, "the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." They had lost that pious zeal which prompted their devout king to exclaim:—a day in thy courts is better than a

thousand. I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

This story, however, affords delightful proof that God never forgets his people, and is a beautiful illustration of his ever-watchful providence. The name of God is nowhere to be found in this book, and yet the hand of God is as distinctly revealed on every page as when it was seen tracing the mysterious characters on the wall of Babylon's palace.

Who wrote the history we are not told ; but from the twentieth verse of the ninth chapter it is supposed it was Mordecai, especially as he knew all the circumstances, and was capable of writing such a book. The scene of

the story is Shushan, a city of Persia, where was the royal palace; and here, probably, Esther was born. Her father and mother dying when she was young, her cousin Mordecai took her for his own daughter.

As Esther grew up, Ahasuerus came into possession of his kingdom, which, under him, extended from India to Ethiopia, over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. In the third year of his reign, having enlarged his empire, and rejoicing in his success, he made a feast, to which he invited all the princes and nobles in his dominions, in order to exhibit the riches of his kingdom, and that they might admire the power and wisdom with which he had amassed such treasures. "Mine

own hand hath gotten me this wealth," was undoubtedly the language of this heathen king. This feast lasted a hundred and eighty days; so that it is probable the guests were invited in companies, and not all at one time. When this was done, he made a feast for all the people living in Shushan, both rich and poor; and, perhaps, history does not furnish an account of a more magnificent entertainment. This feast lasted seven days, and, it is said, was held in the court of the garden of the king's palace. Houses in eastern countries were built square, enclosing a piece of ground in the centre, so that, by spreading a covering across the top of the house, they were protected on every side from the heat of the sun.

This enclosure of the king's palace was probably very large, and would accommodate great numbers of people. It was splendidly decorated with white, green, and blue hangings, or curtains; and these were fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings, which were attached to pillars of marble, with which the court was surrounded. The floor was a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble, and the couches on which they sat were of gold and silver. They drank wine from golden vessels, and these, though they must have been very numerous, were all unlike, charming the guests by the ingenuity and variety of their devices.

In Persia, and the neighboring

countries, women were considered as inferiors, and not admitted to the same table with the men. They were secluded with much care from common observation; and for a woman to appear in public would have been thought the highest breach of decorum. The queen Vashti, therefore, made a feast at the same time for the ladies of Shushan, in the interior of the Palace. On the last day of the feast, the king's heart, in the words of Scripture, was merry with wine; he had drunk so far to excess, that his judgment and sense of propriety were gone, and yielding probably to the solicitations of his half-intoxicated companions, he sent his seven chamberlains to bring Vashti the queen in

her royal dress, that the princes and the people might see her beauty. So drunkenness lays reason and all the finer feelings of the soul to sleep, and awakens only the disorderly and degrading passions. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment. The authority of a king, though he was her husband, could not prevail. She esteemed modesty a higher ornament than beauty; and, though accustomed to unlimited obedience, she felt justified in refusing to make such a sacrifice. This refusal roused the king's anger, and he proposed to his wise men the question, what shall be done to the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not obeyed the king?

Memucan, in behalf of the rest, pronounced this act of the queen an offence, not only against the king, but against all the princes and people; for the report of her disobedience would go everywhere abroad, and the effect of her example would be visible among all the ladies of Persia. There would arise also much contempt and wrath. Women would despise the authority of their husbands, and this would provoke their anger. He proposed, therefore, that the king should send forth a commandment, and that it should be written among the laws of the Medes and Persians, that Vashti should come no more before the king, and that her crown should be given to another of better desert.

And when the king's decree should be published throughout his empire, all the wives should give their husbands honor. This pleased the king, and immediately he despatched letters to every part of his empire, giving order that every man should bear rule in his own house. These letters, translated into the various languages spoken in his dominions, were sent abroad to be read by every people.


Thus ended this royal feast. The princes and nobles returned to their respective provinces, the people of Shushan retired to their homes, the king's palace, lately the scene of confusion and noise, had become quiet, sleep had restored Ahasuerus from the effects of wine, his reason returned,

his mind regaining its wonted calmness, he forgot his anger, and began to inquire for Vashti, the beautiful and beloved queen. But alas ! the transactions of yesterday came over him as a dream when one awaketh ; but what a fatal dream ! He had banished her from his presence, and in an hour of madness had set his seal to the act. It was written among the laws of the Medes and Persians, that the queen Vashti come no more before the king, and the laws of the Medes and Persians could never be altered. The sacred writer gives us only an intimation of Ahasuerus' feelings upon this occasion ; it is said, " he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her ;" but

if, as we judge from other parts of the story, he possessed some of the milder traits of character, and had some regard to justice, how must the remembrance of the virtues of the queen have aggravated his own folly.

But God is the Judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another (Ps. vii, 5, 7). The king's servants proposed an expedient to fill the place of the lamented Vashti. It was resolved, with his consent, to send out through all his dominions, and gather together to Shushan all the fair young virgins. Officers were appointed in all the provinces for this purpose. It is now that Esther, an orphan, but the adopted daughter of Mordecai, is brought forward. Her singular beauty attracted

the admiration of Hegai, the king's chamberlain, who had the charge of the women, and he appointed her the highest place in the house set apart for their reception. If, in addition to her native beauty, the wisdom, humility, and benevolence, which were so conspicuous in her after life, beamed forth in her countenance, it was no wonder she found favor with all who looked upon her. When her turn came to appear before the king, she asked no ornaments, such as were given to the Persian ladies, to heighten her beauty; but, accepting the apparel first offered her, came, according to commandment, into the presence of the king. She concealed the fact that she was born of Jewish parents, as



Mordecai had charged her; for they were still a despised people. "And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight, more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti," who three or four years before was banished from his presence. This joyful occasion was celebrated by a great feast, called Esther's Feast; the king also gave gifts, and granted various privileges in his dominions, that all might partake of his joy. Mordecai now sat in the king's gate, and it is said of Esther, that she obeyed him, even as when she was brought up with him.

"Oh, lovely princess, how goodness heightens beauty!"

And truly this singular humility, contrasted with her sudden and great elevation, was the brightest jewel in her crown.

Providence so ordered it, that a conspiracy against the king's life was formed, about this time, by two of his chamberlains. It was discovered by Mordecai, and, through Esther, communicated to the king. The secret plot was brought to light, and the conspirators were put to death. This circumstance was recorded in the book of the chronicles of the king, and was probably soon forgotten. They saw not the secret hand that was moving all the wheels of this great empire. Who of all their magicians could have searched out the hidden wisdom by

which this seeming accident was to overthrow a plot as yet unformed, and to save from a cruel death the queen and all her people? Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (Job. xi, 7.)

King Ahasuerus, soon after this, formed a peculiar partiality for Haman, an Agagite or Amalekite. He raised him to the highest dignity among his princes, placing him next in honor to himself, and making him his intimate companion and counsellor. Still more to gratify his ambition, the king commanded that all should bow down to him, and reverence him; an act of homage which the Persian kings were accustomed to receive from all who

came into their presence. Accordingly, as he went in and out from the palace, all the king's servants that sat in the gate bowed down to him, but Mordecai bowed not. His companions reproved him, saying, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" this they did day after day, but he replied that he was a Jew. He meant to say by this, that he did not deny this reverence to Haman out of pride, or from contempt of the king's authority; but because Jehovah, the God whom he worshipped, and whom he acknowledged as King of kings, had said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Mordecai was not alone in this; for it is said that some of the wiser Gre-

cians positively refused this act of homage to the Persian kings. Besides, Haman was an Amalekite, one of that nation upon whom the curse of God rested, and with whom he had sworn that he would have war from generation to generation. (See Exod. xvii, 16.) Mordecai's refusal soon came to the knowledge of Haman, who highly resented the affront, perhaps the more, because he was of that hated nation the Jews, and he resolved to seek the destruction both of him and his people. The time in which this plan was to be executed was to be decided by lot.

In ancient times it was customary to refer all important events in this way to their gods, and Haman sup-

posed the time thus fixed upon would be most favorable to his purpose : he little thought that *the disposal of the lot was from the Lord*, the God of the Jews ; and He, who was overruling all events for their good, so ordered it, that sufficient time was left for the accomplishment of their deliverance. The lot was cast in the first month, and it fell upon the twelfth month of the same year. Haman now carries the matter to the king, and, by an artful address, gains full liberty to accomplish, in his own way, the destruction of the Jews. "There is a certain people," he says, as if too small or too contemptible to be named, "scattered abroad in thy kingdom, who have laws of their own, and keep not the king's

laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." Perhaps he represented that their example might injure others, and so disturb the peace of the community. "If it please the king, let it be written, that they may be destroyed." *Let it be written*;—and he knew, if once written, it could never be reversed. Thinking, perhaps, that the king's avarice would suggest an objection, on the ground that the loss of so many subjects would diminish his revenue, he offers to pay ten thousand talents into the king's treasury. It was a part of his plan in the destruction of the Jews, to take all that belonged to them; so that he could so manage it as to be no loser in the end by the payment of this great sum.

Ahasuerus, either infatuated with his attachment to Haman, or so sunk in luxury as to be weary of the charge of affairs in his own kingdom, took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman. Every edict that went forth from the king was sealed with this ring, and his giving it to Haman was, in fact, giving him liberty to do what he pleased in his empire. And the king said to Haman, the silver is given to thee and the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. Haman immediately called together the king's scribes, and had letters prepared to the king's lieutenants, to the governors over every province, and to the rulers of every people in the several provinces. These letters

were written in the various languages spoken in the king's dominions,—for Persia, as we have seen, had lately extended her empire over the neighboring nations,—and were sent by posts into every part of the kingdom, commanding to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, and to take all their possessions. Having sent forth this cruel edict, the king and Haman sat down to drink. But the city Shushan was perplexed. No doubt many of its inhabitants, though not Jews, would sympathise deeply with them in such barbarous cruelty toward an inoffensive people.

When Mordecai perceived all that

was done, he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and bitter cry. These were the ordinary expressions of grief among the Jews. He came even before the king's gate, hoping by his loud lamentations to gain the ear of Esther, to whose presence he was seldom, if ever, admitted, as Persian women are secluded almost entirely from the society of men. He could not now take his accustomed seat, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth; and though by laying it aside, he might have been nearer the queen, yet his object could have been effectually prevented, for no expression of

sorrow was permitted there. His affliction, however, soon reached the ear of Esther through her maids: she was exceedingly grieved, and, ignorant of the cause, sent raiment to clothe him and to take away his sackcloth, that he might return to his place; but he would not receive it. Then Esther called for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her; and sent him to Mordecai, to know what his affliction was, and why it was. Hatach found him in the street, before the king's gate, and Mordecai gave him a full account of all that had been done, with a copy of the decree that was written against the Jews, that he might show it to Esther, with a charge

to her that she should go in to the king, and make supplication for her people. Hatach delivered Mordecai's message, and no doubt Esther's heart was overwhelmed within her ; for she sent him back to say to Mordecai, all the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king, into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre ; but I, she adds, have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. She began probably to suspect, that the king's affections were alienated from her, and this made it doubly dan-

gerous for her to venture uncalled into his presence. There is something in the reply of Mordecai truly worthy of observation. Esther had now been five years queen, she had increased in years as well as in dignity ; but Mordecai seems to overlook it all, and addresses her in a tone of command, and even of severity, which she seems to receive with the unaffected meekness of a child under her guardian. "Think not with thyself," he says, "that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews." Do not satisfy yourself in being silent at this extremity, with the thought that your own life at least will be spared, because you are so nearly allied to the king. "For," he adds, with strong

faith in God, and in the spirit of prophecy, "if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place ; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed, as a punishment for this want of faith in God and love to thy people." Then again to encourage her confidence, he suggests, that perhaps God had an eye to all this in elevating her to her present dignity : "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" This strong appeal to her piety and love for her nation, removed the timid spirit of Esther, and she resolved to go forward in the strength of the God of Israel. She promptly returns to

Mordecai this answer, "go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night nor day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish." She thought it more desirable even to meet death in the way of obedience to God, than by any means to evade the path of duty. She remembered probably the severity exercised towards Vashti; she thought of the high accusation she should have to bring against Haman, the confidential friend and favorite of the king; she was ignorant of the circumstances under which the decree was made, and knew not how

large a part the king might have had in projecting the scheme ; very possibly her imagination suggested that he had discovered her origin, and this might be the cause of her long absence from him. What faith in God then, what holy courage, did her resolution call for ! But she would not take so dangerous a step rashly. She now, in her turn, stirs up Mordecai to devotion, and proclaims a fast to all the Jews present in Shushan ; she and her maidens would fast likewise : for whether Jews or Gentiles, they were under her control, and would undoubtedly sympathize with her in this threatened calamity. It is not likely that they abstained wholly from food during all this time, but they probably

omitted their more important meals, one of which was supper, as Esther speaks of fasting *night* and day. The language of Scripture on this subject is evidently general, as in Acts xxvii. 33, when Paul and his companions are said to have fasted fourteen days, *taking nothing*.

So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther commanded him. Having thus wept and prayed before the Lord, on the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal apparel, perhaps as she was accustomed to do when presenting herself before the king, or because she would now avail herself of every external attraction, and came into the inner court of the king's house, to enter which uncalled

was certain death to all unless the king averted the sentence by holding out the golden sceptre. But when the king saw Esther, she obtained favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand; so Esther drew near and touched the top of the sceptre, perhaps as an expression of gratitude for this unusual favor, and in token of her submission to the king. Then said the king unto her, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom." And Esther answered, "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet I have prepared for him." Though the warm

reception she received might seem to encourage her to open her whole heart, yet she knew too well the temper of the king, and felt too sensibly the delicacy of the case, to venture the expression of her feelings. With admirable wisdom she avails herself of the king's ruling passion, luxury, and by extending her invitation to Haman renders it doubly welcome to the king. She hoped, probably, that He to whom she had committed her cause would open some door for the presenting of her petition. The banquet is called a banquet of wine, because, it is supposed, it consisted not of meats, but of fruits and wines, and was to serve as dessert after a full meal. Then the king said, "Cause Haman to make

haste, that he may do as Esther hath said." At the banquet the king again said to Esther, "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee, and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom, it shall be performed." He knew she had some matter of importance to bring before him, or she would not have taken her life in her hand, and ventured without a command into his presence. But He, who turneth the hearts of all men as the rivers of water are turned, made her feel that the favorable moment had not yet arrived, and she asks of the king only a farther pledge that he would grant her petition when presented. Her reply is, "If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the

king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said."

Here she was evidently under divine guidance; for God had determined, that very night by a singular providence, one of those events which we irreligiously call a fortunate circumstance or accident, to prepare her way before her, almost to perform her work for her.

Haman, in the mean time, goes forth from the royal banquet joyful and with a glad heart; the sight of Mordecai, however, sitting in the king's gate, still unmoved, notwithstanding his new honors, fills him with indignation, and

he was tempted at once to destroy him, which he might easily have done, invested as he was with royal authority; but thinking that vengeance soon awaited him, he refrained himself. Returning to his home, he calls together his friends and Zeresh his wife, and boasts to them of the glory of his riches, of the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said, moreover, "Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself, and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." Poor Haman! he knows not what shall

be on the morrow. Happy would it have been for him, had he learned from the Jewish Scriptures that maxim—a haughty spirit before a fall. “But all this,” he adds, “availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king’s gate.” Zeresh his wife, and his friends of kindred spirit, immediately propose a remedy:—“Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, that it may be conspicuous to all, and strike dread on all Haman’s enemies; and to-morrow speak thou unto the king, that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then you will have nothing to interrupt your pleasure, but may go in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.”

But why does Haman make the gallows to-day, and delay hanging Mordecai till to-morrow? God taketh the wise in their own craftiness. On that night could not the king sleep—*that night*, the night after the feast. But what disturbs his slumbers? It was no wonder if Haman's bloody purpose for the morrow kept *him* waking, or if *Esther*, and *Mordecai*, and *the pious Jews* wrestled with God till break of day; but none of all these things had reached the ear of Ahasuerus. It was God that held his eyes waking. He seeks for something to occupy his mind, and instead of diverting himself, as at other times, with music, or with any of the amusements with which art had surrounded

nim, he calls for the book of the records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king. It was the more strange he should do this, as he seems lately to have been quite weary of the affairs of his empire, and ready to resign all charge to Haman. Towards morning the reader comes to that part of the records where it was written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. This was a wonderful escape indeed; and no wonder the review of it affects the mind of Ahasuerus. Two of those who had waited on his person had laid a plot to take away his life, which would probably

have proved successful, had it not been discovered by Mordecai, and through Esther communicated to the king. Gratitude to his preserver prompts him to ask at once, "What honor hath been done to Mordecai for this?" The king's servants said, "There is nothing done for him." And the king said, "Who is in the court?" (Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.) So early in the morning had he come to execute his malicious purpose. And the king's servants said unto him, "Behold, Haman standeth in the court." Who more suitable, the king would naturally think, to give coun-

sel in such a matter? And he said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" (Now Haman thought in his heart, "To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?") And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear," (probably when he went abroad,) "and the horse which the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:" — this is supposed to mean the crown usually put upon the head of the king's horse, as some say was customary among the Persians, and

especially as no mention is made of the crown in either of the next three verses ;—“and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the (principal) street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.” Haman’s counsel, as usual, pleased the king ; and since he himself was the most noble among the princes, he was the most suitable person to execute the commission. Then the king said to Haman, “ Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mor-

decai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." Haman dared not object, or hesitate to obey. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor." And Mordecai came again to the king's gate; his new honors did not lead him to despise or to neglect his ordinary duties; but Haman hastened to his house, mourning and having his head covered. He relates his sorrows to Zeresh his wife, and to his friends, and to the wise men whom he had perhaps called together to consult in this emergency.

His wise men answered him, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."


We naturally ask, how came these wise men to return such an answer? It has been said, perhaps they wished to gain favor with Mordecai, whom they now saw to be rising; or perhaps they had observed remarkable interpositions in behalf of the Jews: but how do we know but that they and the wise men of whom Matthew tells us, perhaps their own countrymen, had learned to look through nature up to nature's God, and so might now be very appropriately under divine teaching.

And while Haman was thus engaged with his friends, the king's chamberlains came, and hastened to bring him to the banquet that Esther had prepared. So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again to Esther, on the second day, at the banquet of wine, "What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to half of the kingdom." Then Esther the queen answered and said: "If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed,

to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue; although the enemy could not counter-vail the king's damage." She does not mention the name of Haman, but with much simplicity states the case; and, instead of attempting to screen herself, as Mordecai once suggested, with courageous boldness she declares herself included in the edict. "We are sold," she says, "I and my people." Had the sentence been anything but death, even had they been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, she would have been silent, though the loss to the king would have been greater than the enemy could have repaired. Not daunted by his presence

who affirmed that it was not for the king's profit to suffer them, she thus testifies to the loyalty of her people and their promptness to pay the king's tribute. The anger of Ahasuerus was kindled, and he asks, with the earnestness of a disturbed and indignant mind: "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Then Haman was afraid; and the king, arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath, went into the palace garden. He knew not how to conceal, or express, the varied emotions of his mind. He must have time to look back upon the circumstances of that edict, the injustice or extent of which

he had never realized. He must be alone, till he had given way to the mingled feelings of mortification and anger which he felt at having been thus duped by one upon whom he had been lavishing his greatest honors. Haman perceived at once that there was evil determined against him by the king, and he stood up to make request for his life to Esther. Finding the queen unmoved by his earnest entreaty, he falls on his knees upon the couch on which Esther was seated, according to the custom at meals, and there pleads still more earnestly for his life. The king, coming in from the palace garden, finds him in this posture, and his exasperated mind, seeking to aggravate his crimes, is




ready to put the worst construction upon his most innocent actions. He accuses him now of too great familiarity with the queen. His servants, reading their duty in his angry countenance, cover Haman's face, thus making him as a criminal, and that they might spare the king the sight of one who seemed to be so much an object of abhorrence. And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains mentioned in the first chapter, said before the king: "Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman." So they hanged Haman on the gallows prepared for Mordecai, which, being connected with his own house, made

the punishment more ignominious. How wisely did Solomon say, "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place: for a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again, but the wicked shall fall into mischief. On that same day, Ahasuerus gave to Esther the house of Haman with all his riches, as some compensation for the danger to which he had exposed her; and she, for the first time, makes him acquainted with the relation existing between her and Mordecai. Mordecai is now admitted into the king's presence, and Ahasuerus is satisfied with nothing but to bestow upon him all the forfeited honors of Haman. And the king took off his

ring which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther, too, committed to his care the estate of Haman, to manage it for her as he thought best. But Esther's work was not yet completed. Haman was hanged, but the edict sent forth against the Jews was yet in force; for it had been written among the laws of the Medes and Persians, and could not be altered. Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears in some way to avert this cruel decree. Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the

thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" She prudently spares the king all the part he had taken in the scheme, and lays all the blame upon Haman. He assures her of his readiness to grant all her desire, and gives her permission to devise whatever remedy she pleased, and to write in his name, and seal it with the king's ring. This she and Mordecai might have done before, as



Mordecai had been invested with full power, by the giving of the ring ; but they would do nothing without the king's consent.


On the twenty-third day of the third month, the king's scribes were called together again, and letters written, under the direction of Mordecai, addressed to the king's officers in all the various provinces, to each people in their own language, as before, and to the Jews, according to their writing, and according to their language. They were left out of the former letters ; so that Haman's plan appears the more cruel, in giving them no opportunity for defence, or to make their escape. And Mordecai wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the

king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries,—wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life ; to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey ; upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. This decree, coming forth from the king's palace, would intimidate the most bitter enemies of the Jews, and make friends of those who would

otherwise have stood still. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold upon his head,—such a one, probably, as was worn by Persian princes, with sufficient distinction from the king's crown,—and with a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city Shushan rejoiced and was glad. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast, and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

When the thirteenth day of the twelfth month arrived, the day that

Haman had looked upon as the most auspicious for his purposes, the Jews, having gathered themselves together in the cities, stood for their own defence against those that should assault them. Scattered as they were before, they would have fallen an easy prey to their enemies; but now their union is strength: all the officers of the king, too, in all the provinces, helped the Jews, and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. The power of the court was on their side, and, above all, the secret hand of their God was with them. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that



hated them. In the city of Shushan they slew and destroyed five hundred men, among them the ten sons of Haman. The king informed Esther what destruction had been made at Shushan, and infers from it how great that destruction must be in the other parts of the empire, and then adds, "Now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request farther? and it shall be done." The queen had probably reason to think that some of their most malignant enemies had withdrawn themselves for that day, and requests that the same permission be granted to the Jews in Shushan for the next day; and that the bodies of the ten sons of Haman, who had been slain, should be hanged upon the gal-

lows. This was granted, and on the fourteenth day the Jews in Shushan slew three hundred more of their enemies. But the Jews in the other parts of the kingdom performed their whole work on the thirteenth, and slew seventy-five thousand of their foes. But they laid not their hands on the prey: they would show to all, that it was their safety, and that alone, that they sought; and they would gladly give the spoil into the king's treasuries, as an acknowledgment of gratitude for their deliverance. But they must, above all, render thanks to the God of Israel, who had thus marvellously appeared for their help; and the Jews in Shushan kept the fifteenth day, and those of the other provinces the four-

teenth day of the month Adar, as a day of feasting and gladness, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. And Mordecai wrote an account of these things, and sent into all the king's provinces, with counsel to all the Jews to keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar, from year to year, as a feast, in commemoration of these events. And they called them the days of Purim, or of *the lot*, that their very name might bring to mind the great danger from which they had been delivered. This feast was to be kept from generation to generation; and it is said that the Jews used to observe the first of these days with fasting and crying, and other expres-

sions of vehement grief and fear, and the latter with feasting and thanksgiving, and all demonstrations of joy and triumph.

Who, in reading this story, can fail to admire the lovely character of Esther? It charms us the more, because the sacred writer seems to be at no pains to set forth any of her virtues. But where do we ever discover such a union of youth with wisdom, of beauty with modesty, of courage with delicacy and refinement, of high elevation with humble obedience, and, more than all, of deep piety and devotion amidst the splendors of a magnificent, gay, and heathen court?

Who that observes the elevation and fall of Haman, will not be afraid of the first indulgence of *pride*, which is the root of all sin, and which brings down God's heaviest judgments?

Above all, who that reads this story will not desire to fall in with the main design of the sacred writer, and, admiring God's ways toward his people, cast in his lot with them, and make the God of Israel his God?

ESTHER, THE JEWESS.

ESTHER, THE JEWESS.

THE monarch of Persia has wrapped o'er his breast
The vesture whose jewels emblazoned the throne;
His lovely, young queen, who in sackcloth is dressed,
Is far from his presence, and sighing alone.

Deceived by his minion's base falsehood and art,
The king through his empire has issued the word,
Condemning the Jews, who shall fail to depart
At once from the realm, to be put to the sword.

And who, in their cause, is for mercy to sue?
To whose pleading voice will the sovereign give ear?
'Tis death in his kingdom to be now a Jew—
'Tis death in his presence, uncalled, to appear.

The wife of his bosom that peril shall take!

The helpless young Jewess, so gentle and fair,
To live with her people, or die for their sake,
Will go to her lord, and her nation declare.

For little he dreams that his idolized bride,

The joy of his heart, the delight of his eyes,
Is born of that race whom the Persians deride—
The people his nation oppress and despise.

There's wine at the palace, and feasting, and mirth;

In Esther's still chamber there's fasting and prayer.
While he with the crown, has the homage of earth,
She calls on her God, her doomed people to spare.

She thinks of her fathers in Egypt's dark land—

She thinks of the bush, as on Horeb it burned;
And Who hath the hearts of the kings in his hand,
To turn them, as rivers of water are turned.

To Him, for support, and for light to her mind,

She sends up the cries of her soul from the dust;

Then, rising to go to the king, is resigned
To do this and perish, if periah she must.

With fasting and tears she is languid and pale,
But o'er her young face beams the sunrise of soul;
And flesh, though but feeble and ready to fail,
Is urged to its point by the spirit's control.

The woman within her is timid and faint;
The holy believer, unawed and serene.
She goes to the presence, adorned as a *saint*,
With power that has never invested the *queen*.

And, bowed as a lily oppressed by a shower,
She leans on her maidens for nature's support.
In beauty and silence, the delicate flower,
She's now at the palace, and stands in the court.


She looks to the throne, where the sovereign sits high,
Arrayed in his glory—alone in his state.
His sceptre withheld, and the glance of his eye,
That chides her approach, show him fearfully great.

The sight o'er her cheek throws a slight hasty flush,
That, passing, to death's sudden palor gives place;
As leaves of the rose, that too rudely we brush,
Will pass down the side of the pure, snowy vase.

Her life seems departing—her soul taking wing,
Its lustre to shed on its dwelling of clay.
The monarch beholds her; and ruler and king
In lover and husband have melted away.

For love hath an impetus strong in his breast,
And full are the fountains it moves by its force.
The pure gush of feeling can ill be repressed
When this power mysterious reigns at the source.

He leaps from the throne, and her tottering form
Is clasped to his heart, as he fain would confine
The flickering flame, still the temple to warm—
Would hold back the spirit to brighten the shrine.



And now that his Esther may feel in her hold
His glittering sceptre, her terrors to check,
Her white nerveless fingers he bends round the gold,
His rod he with gentleness rests on her neck.

His signals of safety in darkness are hid—
Her vision has failed; and, with grief and alarm,
He marks the cold forehead, the eye's falling lid,
The pale sinking burden that hangs on his arm.

Affection's soft voice he essays, to awake
His paralyzed bride from so fearful a sleep;
He calls on her name, that her answer may break
The spell of a silence so awfully deep.

At length, the checked pulse is beginning to play.
The strings of the harp are again put in tune.
The clouds that came over the morn, fly away;
And life kindles up from the death of the swoon.

The light that had fled coming back to her eye,
She sees on whose bosom her head is at rest ;
By lips parting first but to heave out a sigh,
The thoughts of her heart reassured, are confessed.

"Forgive me, my lord ; for in splendor arrayed,
I saw thee so comely and great, that, bereft
Of strength for its purpose, my soul was afraid,
And fled from thy face !—I had no spirit left."

"Oh, speak not of fear," are the words of the king,
"But tell me thy wish ; if to grant it 'tis mine,
Though this be the gift of my own signet ring,
And even the half of my kingdom, 'tis thine !

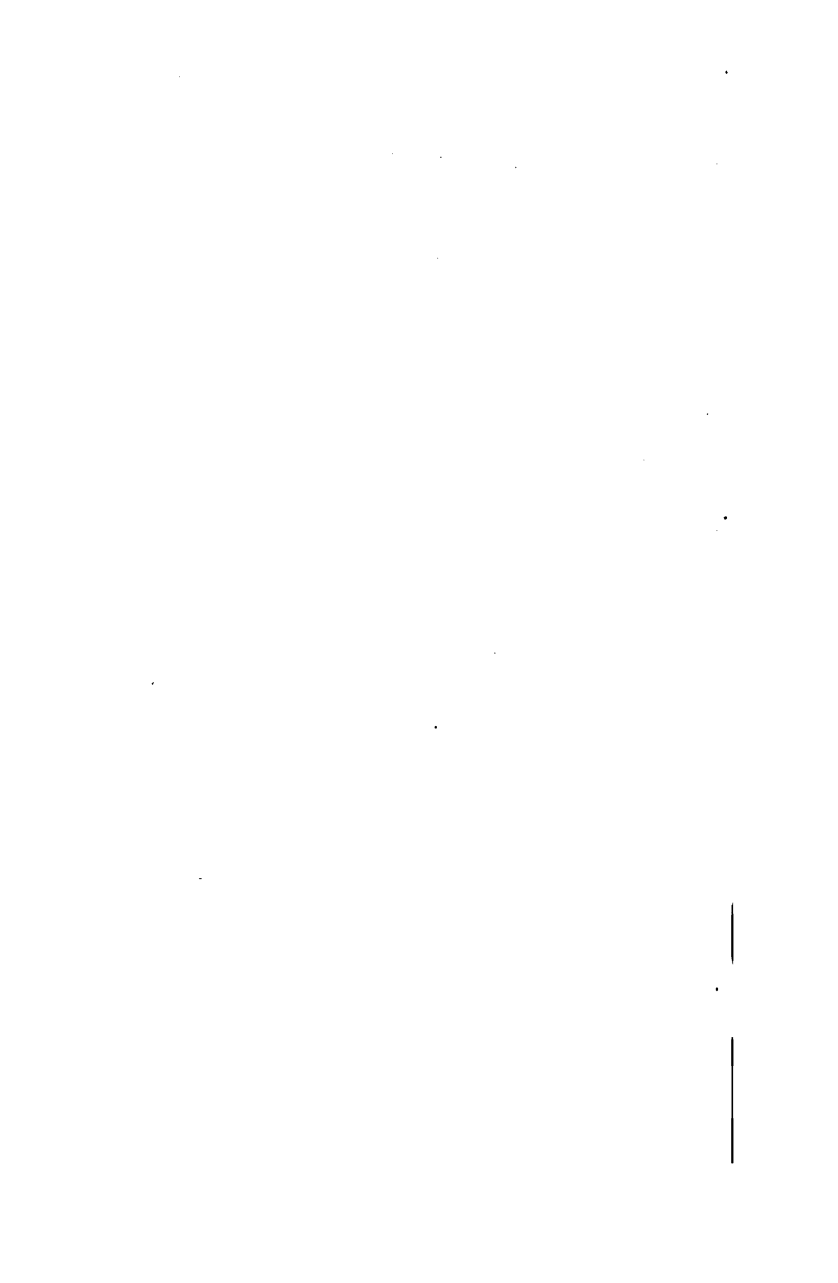
"'Twixt thee and thy purpose shall naught intervene,
Believe, by my throne and the crown on my head !
The law is for subjects, and not for the queen,
Who reigns in the heart of their sovereign, to dread."

And now to her people is safety restored,
With peace and their rights; when resistance had failed
A woman in weakness, who drew on the Lord
For strength, o'er the mighty of earth has prevailed.

Fair Jewess, the tears thou hast dropped in the dust,
Thy name on the palm of Jehovah shall write !
The hand that, in sorrow, has here been thy trust,
Will crown thee in glory, an angel of light !

H. F. GOULD.

NOTE.—It will be perceived that the scene from which this poem takes its materials, has been kept in view as given by Josephus, in company with the account by the sacred historian.



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